

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-16

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

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FOLLOWING TEL SENT ACTION NEW DELHI INFO BOMBAY AND MADRAS  
SEPT 12, 1974, REPEATED TO YOU, QUOTE

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE CALCUTTA 1904

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS SWEL, SOCI, SPOP, IN

SUBJ: CALCUTTA: THE PAVEMENT DWELLERS

SUMMARY. ONE OF THE MOST NOTICEABLE SOCIAL PHENOMENON WHICH STRIKES THE CASUAL VISITOR TO CALCUTTA IS THE LARGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO APPEAR TO LIVE ON THE STREETS AND SIDEWALKS OF THE CITY. ACCORDING TO GOVERNMENT-SPONSORED SURVEYS AND CASE STUDY ANALYSES, THERE ARE A WIDE RANGE OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC TYPES WHO MAKE UP THIS POOREST OF THE POOR POPULATION OF THIS METROPOLIS. THE FOLLOWING IS A SUMMARY OF THE MAJOR FINDINGS OF A SOON-TO-BE PUBLISHED CENSUS OF 10,000 SUCH HUMAN BEINGS ADMINISTERED BY THE CALCUTTA METROPOLITAN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (CMDA) AND THE CALCUTTA METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION (CMPO) IN COLLABORATION WITH THE WEST BENGAL STATE PLANNING BOARD AND THE FORD FOUNDATION. THE STUDY SEEMS PARTICULARLY RELEVANT THIS SEPTEMBER (1974) WHEN MOST OBSERVERS AGREE THAT THE NUMBER OF PAVEMENT DWELLERS

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IS GROWING RAPIDLY--AS RURAL ECONOMIC DISTRESS BECOMES

INCREASINGLY SERIOUS. IN FACT, INTERESTINGLY, THE MAJOR FINDING OF THE STUDY IS THAT MOST OF THE PAVEMENT DWELLERS ARE BENGALI-SPEAKING, HINDU, AGRICULTURAL LABORERS (LANDLESS LABORERS) WHOSE LIVELIHOOD IN THE VILLAGE HAS, FOR A WIDE RANGE OF REASONS, COLLAPSED. ONLY IN THE DEPTHS OF DESPAIR, IN A WORD, DO THESE PEOPLE COME TO CALCUTTA. PROJECTED PROGRAMS OF REHABILITATION ALL INVOLVE RURAL DEVELOPMENT WITH THE HOPE THAT THE PAVEMENT DWELLERS (WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE MENTALLY ILL AND PHYSICALLY DEFORMED) CAN BE CONVINCED TO RETURN TO THEIR VILLAGES. END SUMMARY.

2. ACCORDING TO THE 1971 CENSUS, THERE ARE 48,800 PAVEMENT DWELLERS IN CALCUTTA CITY, THAT RELATIVELY SMALL AREA WITH A POPULATION OF ROUGHLY 3.1 MILLION WHICH IS THE CENTER CITY OF THE METROPOLITAN AREA (POPULATION ROUGHLY 8.5 MILLION IN 1971). BY SEPTEMBER 1973 WHEN THE SURVEY OF 10,000 WAS UNDERTAKANE, THE CMDA ESTIMATED THAT THE NUMBERS OF SUCH HUMANS HAD GROWN TO PERHAPS 175,000. SOME OBSERVERS THINK MORE BUT AT ANY RATE ABOUT SIX PERCENT OF THE INNER CITY POPULATION IS INVOLVED. TRY TO KEEP IN MIND THAT WE ARE HERE DESCRIBING THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROUP BELOW THAT OF SLUM (BUSTEE) DWELLERS.

3. SOME PRIMARY SOCIOLOGICAL DATA ABOUT THE GROUP (WORTH NOTING CAREFULLY): (A) ABOUT 98 PERCENT WERE BORN OUTSIDE OF CALCUTTA; (B) ABOUT 73 PERCENT ARE HINDU; 25 PERCENT MUSLIM; (C) 69 PERCENT ARE BENGALI-SPEAKING; 25 PERCENT HINDI SPEAKING; FOR PERCENT URDU SPEAKING; TWO PERCENT ORIYA, NEPALI AND TELEGU SPEAKING; (D) 67 PER CENT HAVE THEIR ORIGINS IN WEST BENGAL (24 PARGANAS, MIDNAPORE AND HOWRAH DISTRICTS ESPECIALLY); 20 PERCENT ARE FROM BIHAR; SEVEN PERCENT FROM BANGLADESN; THREE PERCENT FROM UTTAR PRADESH AND 2 PERCENT FROM ANDHRA PRADESH, ORISSA AND NEPAL; (E) 43 PERCENT ARE CHILDREN, I.E., BELOW THE AGE OF 15 (THIS IS AN ACCURATE RELECTION OF INDIAN POPULATION, WHEREIN 42 PERCENT OF THE NATION IS 14 YEARS OR BELOW); (F) 33 PERCENT HAVE REGULAR EMPLOYMENT (SERVANTS, RICKSHAW-PULLERS, CART-PUSHERS) AND THESE PEOPLE OFTEN REMIT MONEY HOME); 28 PERCENT GET CASUAL EMPLOYMENT; 22 PERCENT LIVE ONLY ON CHARITY (PRIVATE, INDIVIDUAL AS WELL AS INSTITUTIONAL--SUCH AS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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RAMAKRISHNA MISSION, SALVATION ARMY, MOTHER THERESA'S MISSIONARIES OF CHARITY); THE BALANCE 17 PERCENT HAS EMPLOYMENT OF SORTS (COWDUNG COLLECTING, RAG AND WASTE PAPER-PICKERING, ETC.); (G) 64 PERCENT ARE CONSIDERED TO BE PERMANENT DWELLERS IN CALCUTTA ; 24 PERCENT ARE SEASONAL MIGRANTS; (H) 53 PERCENT OF THOSE INTERVIEWED HAD COME TO CALCUTTA IN THE PAST FIVE YEARS, I.E., 1968-73; 27 PERCENT HAD BEEN HERE 5 TO 15 YEARS; 19 PERCENT MORE THAN 15 YEARS; (I) 58

PERCENT WERE AGRICULTURAL LABORERS BEFORE COMING TO CALCUTTA;  
(J) 10 PERCENT EAT THREE MEALS A DAY; 52 PERCENT TWO MEALS  
A DAY; 37 PERCENT ONE MEAL A DAY AND THREE PERCENT MANAGE WITH  
A "FEW" MEALS A WEEK; (K) 67 PERCENT COOK THEIR FOOD ON THE  
PAVEMENT; 22 PERCENT GIVE FLOUR TO "HOTELS" TO PREPARE  
CHAPATIS FOR THEM (ON PAYMENT OF TWO PAISA PER CHAPATI);  
SEVEN PERCENT LIVE TOTALLY ON FOOD COOKED BY OTHERS AND  
DONATED TO THEM; FOUR PERCENT HAVE "NO SOURCE" OF FOOD, NOT  
EVEN CHARITY; (L) 68 PERCENT HAVE SMALLPOX VACCINATIONS;  
(M) 56 PERCENT ARE "VERY POOR" (RS. 0-80) IN MONTHLY INCOME  
RANGE; 32 PERCENT ARE "MIDDLE CLASS" (RS. 80-140) AND 12  
PERCENT ARE "WELL-OFF" (RS. 140 AND ABOVE); (N) 33 PERCENT ARE  
ONE-MEMBER FAMILY UNITS; 35 PERCENT ARE 2-4 MEMBER; 26 PERCENT  
ARE 5-7 MEMBER; AND SIX PERCENT ARE 8 MEMBER AND ABOVE.

4. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE HAZARDS OF LIFE FOR THE PAVEMENT  
DWELLERS? POLICE AND YOUTHFUL "MISCREANTS". POLICE RUN PROTEC-  
TION RACKETS AS THE DWELLERS ARE SUBJECT TO EVICTION FROM THEIR  
"TURF" WHETHER IT BE A STREET PAVEMENT, A MUNICIPAL PARK,  
UNDER A BRIDGE, ON CANAL EMBANKMENTS, ETC. YOUTHFUL  
"MISCREANTS", OFTEN CONGRESS PARTY TOUGHS (PERHAPS ONE REASON  
THE STUDY HAS NOT BEEN "CLEARED" YET), LIKE TO HARASS THE  
DWELLERS; THEY LIKE TO FLIRT AND "MORE" WITH UNMARRIED GIRLS.  
THEY ARE DIFFICULT TO REFUSE ("IT IS OFTEN CONSIDERED UNWISE  
TO REPULSE THEIR ADVANCES").

5. THE RELATIVELY LARGE NUMBER OF ONE-MEMBER FAMILY UNITS  
IN LARGE-FAMILY INDIA IS USUALLY A REFLECTION OF SOME PERSONAL  
TRAGEDY WHICH RESULTS IN LEAVING THE VILLAGE AND COMING TO  
THE CITY. INCLUDED HERE ARE BARREN WOMEN (DISCARDED BY HUSBANDS  
IN FAVOR OF A SECOND MARRIAGE), UNWED MOTHERS, WIDOWS, AL-  
COHOLICS, NARCOTICS ADDICTS, LEPERS, UNWANTED GRANDPARENTS,  
PROSTITUTES AND SO ON.

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6. COMMENT: MOST BENGALIS HERE THINK THAT MOST OF THE  
PAVEMENT DWELLERS ARE BIHARIS, ORIYAS OR FROM "SOMEWHERE ELSE".  
MANY CALCUTTA-BASED NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN INDIANS THINK THESE  
PEOPLE ARE SIMPLY FURTHER EVIDENCE OF THE FECKLESSNESS AND LAZINESS  
OF BENGALIS (RATHER BEG THAN WORK, THESE CHAPS). THESE  
MENTAL SETS, HONESTLY HELD, PROBABLY HELP REINFORCE THE FEELING  
THAT THE GENERAL COMMUNITY IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE WELFARE  
OF THE PAVEMENT DWELLERS. THE STUDY, HOWEVER, APPEARS TO SHOW  
THAT THE PAVEMENT DWELLING POPULATION IS FAIRLY REPRESENTATIVE  
OF THE CITY'S POPULATION AS A WHOLE, THAT THE VAST MAJORITY  
ARE IN ACUTE ECONOMIC DISTRESS DUE TO FACTORS BEYOND  
THEIR CONTROL, THAT THEY COME TO CALCUTTA EXPECTING GREATER  
OPPORTUNITY AND THAT BY AND LARGE THEY MANAGE TO ADAPT AND  
SURVIVE. THE NUMBERS CONTINUE TO INCREASE. THE SURVEY

FOUND 59 PERCENT HAD COME IN THE 1968-73 PERIOD AND MANY CALCUTTANS THINK, AND VISUALLY IT SEEMS TO BE THE CASE, THAT THIS YEAR IS AN ALL-TIME--BARRING THE 1943 BENGAL FAMINE PERIOD--HIGH IN IN-MIGRATION. THE QUESTION ARISES WHETHER WILL BE ABLE TO CONTINUE TO ADAPT AND SURVIVE. THE JUDGMENT OF THOSE IN THE STATE GOVERNMENT WHO HAVE THOUGHT ABOUT THIS SOCIAL GROUP IS THAT ANY SERIOUS WELFARE PROGRAM IN THE CITY TO BETTER THEIR LOT OR PROSPECTS WOULD REPIDLY ATTRACT MANY MORE RURAL PEOPLE IN DISTRESS. THIS IS AN UNACCEPTABLE PROSPECT. BUT SO IS THEIR CONDITION IN THE CITY. SO, THE THINKING GOES, THEY MUST BE SENT BACK TO THEIR PLACES OF ORIGIN. THEORETICALLY ACCEPTABLE BUT PRACTICALLY SPEAKING THE HUMAN FLOW IS INCREASING FROM THE COUNTRYSIDE TO THE URBAN CENTER. SO, WHAT TO DO? PROBABLY NOT MUCH. THERE ARE SO MANY OTHER RELATED BUT MORE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS TO BE ADDRESSED FIRST.

7. FINAL NOTE: AS NOTED ABOVE, THE REPORT IS NOT CLEARED. THE COPY WE HAVE IS INSCRIBED BY THE SECRETARY, CMDA, AS FOLLOWS, "THIS IS ONLY A DRAFT REPORT YET TO BE FINALIZED. FOR RESTRICTED USE: NOT TO BE CITED WITHOUT PERMISSION." WE PROMISED TO FOLLOW THIS REQUEST.

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